GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON PROHIBITIONS OR RESTRICTIONS ON THE USE OF CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS WHICH MAY BE DEEMED TO BE EXCESSIVELY INJURIOUS OR TO HAVE INDISCRIMINATE EFFECTS

CCW/GGE/II/WP.11
15 July 2002

Original: ENGLISH

Second Session
Geneva, 15-26 July 2002

Group of Governmental Experts on Explosive Remnants of War

Information needs from a field perspective

Prepared at the request of the Co-ordinator by Landmine Action (UK)

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide background to facilitate discussion of core questions under item 4 of the mandate of the Group of Governmental Experts. It is intended to inform discussion from a field perspective, and to respond to some of the points previously raised in Working Paper 8.[1]

Background

Post-conflict, it should be possible to virtually eliminate situations where casualties arise among civilians as a consequence of encounters with the explosive remnants of war (ERW).

Casualties that occur in the post conflict setting could be minimised, or ideally eliminated, through two areas of activity. Firstly, communities and returnees should be made aware of the risks of ERW through effective risk education. Secondly, the threat of ERW should be removed as quickly as is practical. In order to conduct these activities rapidly and effectively it is vital that those entities charged with implementing them have access to reliable information that consists of:

- General information about the appearance and distribution of ERW in order to allow risk awareness strategies to be developed and delivered;

- Detailed technical information covering the types of weapons used and where they were used in order to allow rapid the removal of ERW to take place.

Where general and technical information can be provided promptly the number of casualties and the wider impact on reconstruction and development can be reduced sharply.

[1] United States delegation, Information Sharing as a Tool to Protect Civilians from the Effects of UXO/ERW, CCW/GGE/I/WP.8

Information for ERW risk awareness education

Risk awareness education (RAE) is a vital and cost-effective tool in the overall strategy to minimise casualties caused by ERW. In virtually every case there will be a significant delay following the cessation of hostilities before effective programmes to remove ERW can be mobilised and so RAE is a vital first step.

In order to provide effective risk awareness it is essential that those organisations charged with its delivery are provided with information to enable them to design accurate and effective awareness strategies. This information should consist of:

- Visual information that accurately conveys the appearance of munitions both in their pristine state and as they are likely to appear in the conflict area;
- Information detailing where the munitions are likely to be;
- The quantity and concentrations of ERW;
- In general terms, the magnitude and nature of the threat that respective munitions present;
- In general terms, the sensitivity of respective munitions;
- The toxicity of certain types of munitions such as those containing rocket fuel and white phosphorous including implications and precautions.

Information required for ERW clearance

The two pivotal components of technical information that would assist entities in the removal of ERW are:

- The location of use or impact point of munitions;

- The type of munitions to have been deployed together with the recommended disposal procedures.

Location

The provision of information detailing the geographical location of ERW will be dependent upon there being effective means of recording the relevant data. Field commanders usually record information regarding targets and objectives; this, with the addition of a record of munitions such as grenades and light mortars used, would provide the location of concentrations of these types of UXO.

In the case of air-dropped munitions, the process should be straightforward since the navigational systems on aircraft are relatively sophisticated and the release point from which the impact point can be calculated can be easily recorded. It should also be technically feasible to provide detail of the impact points of many of the larger land-based weapon systems with combined navigational and targeting systems.

The geographical information required should be submitted in a form that is readily integrated into geographical information systems including the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) developed by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

Types of munitions

It is essential that, in order to be effective, clearance organisations have a clear understanding of the spectrum of munitions they are likely to encounter. This is important for two reasons. The first of these is so that clearance organisations are adequately prepared in terms of equipment; it may not be feasible to rapidly fill any gaps in an equipment inventory following deployment to what may be a remote area with poor or disrupted infrastructure. The second is so that effective training and operational methodologies can be formulated to minimise the risk of casualties and optimise capability.

For the greater part the nature and associated risks of dealing with the removal of ERW is well understood. This is not the case in circumstances where new, unfamiliar, and therefore potentially more hazardous weapon systems are deployed. An example of this is cluster bomblets with a variety of fuzing systems, some of which could be more hazardous than others to clearance teams. Information detailing the particular variants will avoid forcing clearance organisations, including military disposal teams, to apply unnecessarily cautious and therefore slow procedures.

The provision of technical information

In view of the fact that RAE is usually the first means of reducing casualties due to ERW, prompt action is essential in the interval immediately following the cessation of hostilities. Military commanders will be in a position to rapidly provide much of the above information since they will know in advance what types of munitions they are expecting to use. It would be straightforward therefore to produce packs containing the relevant information so that it could be rapidly disseminated to those entities delivering RAE. Preparation of much of this material could easily take place in peacetime.

As soon as practical, when the security situation allows, efforts to remove ERW are usually started. Delay in providing information has two main effects on the process to clear ERW:

- entities engaged in clearance, and in particular clearance of cluster bomblets, spend a lot of time searching for strikes, time that could be spent more productively on the actual clearance of munitions;

- a lack of information detailing the variants of munitions and associated fuzing mechanisms, obliges clearance organisations to observe worst-case operating procedures and assume the most hazardous fuzing systems were fitted, which significantly impacts upon the rate of clearance.

The consequence of these two effects will be more casualties occurring than might otherwise have been the case.

Safeguarding information

Technical information has sometimes been withheld from clearance organisations on the grounds that to provide it would compromise security and therefore military effectiveness. However, as soon as a weapon has been dropped, neither it, nor the intended target, can be

regarded as a secret. By inhibiting RAE and clearance, unnecessary secrecy can undermine wider operational objectives, such as alleviating the suffering of refugees, since additional casualties will be caused by the absence of technical information.

It would seem unlikely that a situation would arise where there would be a conflict of military and humanitarian interests with pressure being applied for commanders to release information that retained its military sensitivity. It is improbable that RAE or clearance organisations would wish to commence activities in an active conflict zone since this would be hazardous and possibly counter-productive.

Render safe procedures (RSPs) would not in themselves compromise military operational effectiveness since these are not directly related to the way a munition functions or is used. The RSPs that would be required would, for example, provide information about where a demolition charge should be placed and whether or not it is safe to touch a munition in this procedure. This will not in any way compromise operational effectiveness by conveying precise details of how a given munition or its fuze functions.

It is likely that commanders would wish to retain information about the types of weapon they are planning to deploy but the dissemination of RSPs immediately prior to clearance of ERW also will not compromise operational effectiveness. It is understandable that commanders would want to be confident that adequate safeguards are in place, as part of any future agreement. In broad terms this suggests it might be useful to discuss a measure to ensure that information considered sensitive is released to approved clearance entities when there is agreement between parties to a conflict about the manner and timing in which this information is to be used.

Methodology

A methodology for the provision of technical information concerning munitions used in areas not under the control of the user should be relatively straightforward to formulate. Data that details weapon type, impact point and recommended disposal procedures could be submitted to an agreed neutral third party, for example the Secretary-General of the UN, or clearance organisations approved by parties to ceasefire agreements or other relevant military technical agreements.

This information should be distributed to those organisations requiring it for RAE or ERW removal purposes as early as possible to enable advance preparation, and in any case as soon as it can be agreed by the parties to a conflict that a favourable security situation prevails in any given area and that approved clearance organisations are ready to deploy. This should enable RAE and clearance to take place without delay in areas of territory no longer subject to active hostilities, and where civilians are at risk.

Advance preparation

It should be feasible to produce information packs detailing render safe procedures (the methods used to destroy or neutralise a munition) and hazards associated with particular munitions ahead of time during peacetime in preparation for rapid dissemination to clearance entities.

Summary

- The provision of information covering the types and locations of munitions deployed is pivotal to the effective delivery of RAE and the removal of ERW;

- Provided reasonable safeguards are applied, the provision of technical information will not compromise military effectiveness or strategy;

- Some components of the information that is required could be prepared in peacetime to enable more rapid dissemination of information at the appropriate time.
